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“It’s a big world in here”: Contemporary Voyage Drama and the Politics of Mobility

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Abstract: In Renaissance and Restoration England, many popular plays functioned as “voyage dramas,” offering opportunities for vicarious tourism to their audiences (McInnis 2012). The theatre became one site in which to receive and negotiate information about elsewhere, at a time before mass access to travel was available. The tagline of London’s Young Vic theatre – “It’s a big world in here” – suggests that something of this spirit survives in twenty-first-century performance. It is a sentiment that we find also in the festival director Mark Ball’s assertion that “theatre is my map of the world.” But the version of the world created here is necessarily skewed by a politics of mobility (Cresswell 2010): the uneven frictions, routes, speeds, levels of comfort, and power relations affecting how theatre-makers and productions move around the world. And contemporary audiences are themselves likely to come to the theatre with multiple and unequal experiences of travel. This article asks what function contemporary voyage dramas serve in a context of the widespread mobility of people, finance, goods and ideas, and what might be the political challenges of representing travel in the theatre. It investigates the claim to authenticity, the negotiation of privilege and remoteness, and the role of the performer as mediator in theatrical travel narratives. In particular, it focuses on Simon McBurney’s solo performance *The Encounter* (2015), arguing that its virtuosity served in part to tame – rather than to confront the challenge of – the world it sought to represent.

Keywords: voyage drama, Simon McBurney, *Complicite*, *The Encounter*, Chris Dobrowolski, Antarctica, travel, mobility, international, travelogue, solo performance, privilege

“Artists have always traveled and provided a lens through which the rest of us look around.”
Lucy R. Lippard, *On the Beaten Track* (4)

“While travelogues seek to challenge traditional geographies of identity, they are often complicit in maintaining them.”
Laura Levin, *Performing Ground* (176)

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I begin with two moments in the theatre.

Moment one. A small, 100-seat studio theatre in Oxford, UK, April 2016. A man stands alone on a stage with the technological tools of presentation visible around him. He has been recounting a journey to a remote part of the world. He sets the needle of a record player onto a disc – Vaughan Williams, *Symphonia Antarctica* – and starts to project a film that he has made. The screen shows mostly white: snow and a bleached-out sky. In the foreground is a sledge crafted by the man out of sections of gold picture frames; it is heavily laden with crates and bags. An orange-clad figure on a snowmobile – the field assistant – tows the sledge into the distance as the image fades to white and the man on stage explains that the spring in his 1920s 16 mm camera had wound down before he could complete the footage he was aiming for.

Moment two. A large, 1100-seat auditorium in London, UK, February 2016. A man stands alone on a stage with the technological tools of presentation visible around him. He has been recounting a journey to a remote part of the world. He holds a speaker up to a binaural microphone shaped like a head and plays the sound of a small plane flying; as he moves the speaker around the head, the sound moves from the left to the right ear of the headphones worn by the audience. The man plays the part of both the pilot (live) and the explorer (pre-recorded at a lower pitch) in a scene in which the plane lands on water; he also “plays the part” of the water, gently rocking a bottle of water next to the microphone and then pressing a pedal to loop the sound as a backdrop to his story of arriving in the jungle.

These two moments are each part of recent attempts to represent travel in the theatre: respectively, Chris Dobrowolski’s *Antarctica* (2010) and Complicite and Simon McBurney’s *The Encounter* (2015). Dobrowolski’s is a solo performance-lecture about his stint as resident artist on the British Antarctic Survey’s Artists’ and Writers’ Programme. In it, he presents a series of model boxes as a creative response to the residency and tells of his encounters with scientists, animals, equipment and landscape in an inhospitable environment. Perhaps most of all he tells of his failures: miscommunications, accidents, technical hitches, and reactions of blank incomprehension to his work. McBurney’s solo performance, to which I will return in more detail later in this article, stages the journey of a *National Geographic* photographer, Loren McIntyre, into a remote area of Brazil and his subsequent encounter with member of an Amazon tribe. The show expertly conjures McIntyre’s experiences, making extensive use of live and recorded sound to layer the journey with other strands of material (specifically a set of reflections on consciousness recorded with scientists, and McBurney’s conversations with his daughter over the course of an evening).

In this article, I am interested in teasing out some of the implications of theatrical travel narratives, charting the impulse to create them and suggesting a

critical framework – alert to a politics of mobility – that can help to understand how they function. One of my reasons for discussing *The Encounter* as a key example here is its visibility: this is a performance by a high-profile company that has, since its premiere at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2015, enjoyed an international tour across Europe, Australia and the US, as well as being livestreamed on the internet. Meeting with critical acclaim, *The Encounter* is by some measures a highly successful attempt to stage a journey. However, I will suggest that it is in large part its expertise – the technical brilliance and theatrical mastery of the performance – that prevents it from fully engaging with the political dimension of theatre as travel. Reflecting on some of the impulses, features and problems of representing travel, this article seeks to raise questions about the continuing urge to stage travellers' tales and to imagine some of its possibilities.

Voyage Drama

When asked what magic he has used to win Desdemona as a wife, Shakespeare's Othello reveals that it was his tales of travel that wooed her. He tells of “disastrous chances” and “hair-breadth scapes,” of hills “whose heads touch heaven,” and of “men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders” (I.iii,134–45); Desdemona is both enthralled by the strangeness of the stories and full of awe and pity for the man who has endured such dangers. Theatre audiences, too, have a tendency to be seduced by travellers' tales, and there is a long history of the theatre space as one in which to experience a journey.

Renaissance audiences would have recognised the fantastical and incredulous trope of the travellers' tales spun by Othello, and would have had access to a growing number of alternative narratives of travel, both within and beyond the theatre. Many popular plays at this time functioned as what has been termed “voyage drama,” offering opportunities for armchair travel to their audiences (McInnis; Jowitt). *The Tempest* is perhaps the most well-known example now, but others include Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, Fletcher and Massinger's *The Sea Voyage*, and Brome's *The Antipodes*. David McInnis characterises such plays as those that “incorporate scenes of travel, deploy genuinely exotic settings which are not mere foils for London, or are in some way concerned with the motivations and consequences of travel”, and he suggests that voyage drama “occupied a consistent [...] place in the repertory of most playing companies in early modern England” (7). Through these plays, the theatre became one site in which to receive and negotiate information and ideas about voyaging, as well as collectively to imagine an elsewhere, at a time before mass access to travel was available.

Dramatists of the time may have bemoaned the difficulty of presenting travel on stage, but that did not prevent them trying.

I am setting out a context drawn from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theatre, even within a contemporary theatre journal, for two reasons. The first is to remind us that the theatre's attempts to stage mobilities are not new. While I would agree with Kofi Annan when he suggested to the United Nations in 2006 that we are living in a "new era of mobility," with its particular challenges and opportunities, it is useful to think of this as replacing not an old era of stability or fixity but rather a different and still complex combination of stillnesses and movements. The second reason is to raise the question of whether "voyage drama" is still a useful category for us now; if so, what function might it serve for audiences with vastly different levels of access to travel than their Renaissance counterparts?

Certainly, a sense of theatre as a vehicle for travel persists in the twenty-first century. In tracing contemporary rhetorics of theatre as travel we might look to London's Young Vic theatre, whose tagline – "It's a big world in here" – makes a broad claim for the transporting power of theatre at the same time as perhaps a more specific claim for the cosmopolitan outlook of its programming. Similarly, the festival director Mark Ball asserts that "theatre is my map of the world." As the current artistic director of LIFT, the London International Festival of Theatre, Ball's role entails using theatre to generate an understanding of what it might mean to be *international*. If theatre can function as a map in this context, the metaphor carries with it some of the problems associated with the map as a way of knowing the world: it is selective, drawn from one perspective among many, and only useful for wayfinding as long as the territory to which it refers does not change. But it also has the potential to offer an alternative to other existing maps, contesting their claims to accuracy and charting journeys that might otherwise be overlooked. Rustom Bharucha, writing about LIFT's work, insists that "not only do we need to claim the international, but we urgently need to reinvent it" (104). He is concerned about the position of privilege from which discourses of the international are often generated, and I will come back to questions of privilege later in discussing a politics of mobility. For now, I want to note that Bharucha's statement offers one potential answer to the question of what function voyage drama might now serve: to reinvent, or at least attempt to reshape, what we understand by the international.

In his contribution to a volume dedicated to exploring *'The Tempest' and Its Travels*, Joseph Roach traces adaptations of *The Tempest* through the Restoration period. He argues that these served as a form of "vicarious tourism," which he suggests "occurs when the commodified experience of a local event substitutes for the direct experience of a remote destination" (62). There are many instances

in contemporary theatre of remote destinations being packaged as local events (bearing in mind that “remote” and “local” are, of course, relative terms here); a key difference, though, is that these are no longer encountered as substitutes for the audience’s own experiences of tourism. Indeed, contemporary audiences are likely to come to the theatre with multiple, complex and unequal experiences of travel, such that it is difficult to generalise about the pleasures to be taken in the vicarious tourism offered by the stage. Susan Bennett, in an insightful article on theatre and tourism, recognises this when she suggests that we need to change our “conceptualization of production and reception” in response to contemporary patterns of mobility: she argues that “we need to recognize a mobility that neither theatre nor audience has experienced in the past – or at least never in the dimensions and the formats that exist today” (425).

One consequence of this is that audiences now perhaps expect something more, or rather something different, of the theatre’s travel tales than their early-modern equivalents. Raising questions of the function of voyage drama involves a consideration of the role of the artist in creating it, and I would suggest that it is a role that is both fundamentally mobile and in dialogue with a range of other mobile figures, including the tourist and the journalist. Shakespeare need not have experienced a sea journey to write *The Tempest* (and indeed Prospero’s enchanted island is geographically impossible, seemingly aligned with the “new world” of the Americas at the same time as being situated on the return journey between north Africa and Naples), but the current context of unprecedented global mobility places a different expectation on contemporary writers and artists. Founded on the belief that artists see the world differently than others, many artist-in-residence schemes involve the incumbent accompanying soldiers, scientists, sailors or journalists as they travel for their work. The art critic Lucy Lippard reminds us that “artists have always traveled and provided a lens through which the rest of us look around” (4), but it is worth adding that the nature of this lens is not often interrogated, nor is its relationship with the lens provided by other specialist travellers. How might the artistic gaze intersect with what John Urry (2002) has theorised as the tourist gaze? What is the relationship between these two positions and what we might term the scientific gaze or the journalistic gaze? And how do the viewing positions and practices of theatre audiences fit into or complicate these patterns?

I began this article by recalling a moment from Chris Dobrowolski’s performance *Antarctica*, and noting that the work was created as a response to the commission that Dobrowolski received to work alongside scientists of the British Antarctic Survey. *Antarctica* both embraces and gently mocks the principle of the artist’s alternative perspective; the advertising blurb sets out the project as follows:

Antarctica is the coldest, windiest, driest place in the world, home to a few scientists, engineers and medical professionals all at the top of their game. Every day is about survival. Every day is about saving the planet.

Then Chris came along to make some Art.

For three and a half months Chris lived and worked alongside the team at the British Antarctic Survey. He discovered that sometimes it's very difficult to justify your position as an Artist whilst everyone around you is a Hero. (n. pag.)

Dobrowolski's work develops networks of playful connections between modes of cultural representation and the people and places that he encounters, at the same time as it reflects upon the peculiar privilege and problem of the artist in non-art environments. I began with this in part because it might stand as an example of a particular strand of contemporary voyage drama: the staged travelogue. Typically using a performance-lecture format, the travelogue positions its solo performer centre stage and proceeds via a series of anecdotes and accompanying images to reflect upon a place or set of places. An individual experience of journeying is presented as an insight into both a specific place and a specific person (the performer-traveller), and examples include Spalding Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia*, David Hare's *Via Dolorosa* and Laurie Anderson's *Slideshow*. But I also wanted to include *Antarctica* here because I am intrigued by its positioning of Dobrowolski as inexperienced traveller, particularly when set against the trope of expertise that characterizes my other opening example (Simon McBurney's *The Encounter*, discussed further below). In the moment I described, *Antarctica* simultaneously imagines an ideal version of its artistic intervention into an unfamiliar landscape and fails to deliver it, and this is emblematic of the show's strategies. As the whiteness of the film seeps over the whiteness of the South Pole, a gap is created in which the audience might reflect on what is at stake in performing travel and what function it might serve.

Mobility Politics

Theatrical travelogues of the kind I have briefly pointed to here make visible and available for scrutiny the processes of travel that arguably underpin all theatre. Just as Michel de Certeau asserts that "every story is a travel story" (115), so we might add that every performance is predicated upon multiple journeys. Theatre, in its circulation and production, has an intrinsic mobility, in ways that often remain hidden at the level of encounter and analysis. This means that what also frequently remains hidden is the politics of that mobility. The travels of actors, directors, stage crew, critics and audiences underpin the contemporary international theatre scene, but our access to these mobile practices as sites of meaning-

making is limited. We might catch glimpses of them in artist's interviews, in diaries and blogs of theatre-making and theatre-going, in post-show discussions, and in the seemingly banal itineraries recorded in festival archives (but see P.A. Skantze's book *Itinerant Spectator/Itinerant Spectacle* for a rare attempt to conceive an analytical methodology from a position of movement). My interest in contemporary voyage drama arises in part from the possibilities it seems to offer to examine travel as at the same time a critical category and a foundational experience of the theatre.

Taking travel as a critical category involves asking questions about who gets to travel by choice in a world of global flows, how this travel intersects with less voluntary movements, which routes are prioritized and which are neglected, and whose travel stories are recorded and circulated. I want to sketch a critical approach to these questions, drawing on the scholarship of Caren Kaplan, Tim Cresswell, Doreen Massey and Laura Levin. In her influential book *Questions of Travel*, Caren Kaplan makes it clear that "[a]ll displacements are not the same" and yet

the occidental ethnographer, the modernist expatriate poet, the writer of popular travel accounts, and the tourist may all participate in the mythologized narrativizations of displacement without questioning the cultural, political, and economic grounds of their different professions, privileges, means, and limitations. Immigrants, refugees, exiles, nomads, and the homeless also move in and out of these discourses as metaphors, tropes, and symbols but rarely as historically recognized producers of critical discourses themselves. (2)

While we might wonder whether anything can be said from a position of privilege without reinforcing its own dominance, it seems possible that the process of destabilization that Kaplan goes on to advocate could be undertaken from within as well as outside the travelling elite. The theatre might participate in creating the "mythologized narrativizations of displacement" noted here, but it also holds at least the potential to create a space for the kind of questioning that Kaplan finds generally lacking.

I have taken the phrase "politics of mobility" in this article's title from the work of the geographer Tim Cresswell. Like Kaplan, Cresswell observes that "mobility is a resource that is differentially accessed" (21), always wrapped up in power, and therefore always political. He identifies six features of mobility politics, taking into account differentials in point of departure, speed, rhythm, route, experience, and the frictions that movement comes up against. He emphasises that these differences "are both productive of [...] social relations and produced by them" (21). The kind of taxonomy proposed by Cresswell may seem, for some, too systematic to allow for nuance and the complexity of relationships between categories, but I have found it useful as a call to attend to the specific

material conditions of mobile practices. To take his categories in turn is to remind ourselves of the intricate and sometimes clashing forces at work in the movement of not just people but also objects (including, for our purposes, artistic products such as theatre shows). So the point of departure, Cresswell notes, differs across instances of movement. The reasons for movement and the motivations compelling or inviting it are an intrinsic part of the hierarchy of mobility. We see this all too readily in the global refugee crisis, where I would add that part of the ethical discomfort many of us feel in response to media reports stems from the press's eagerness to judge the motivations of migrants while glossing over their stark lack of a shared starting point with more affluent travellers. The second of Cresswell's categories is speed. He acknowledges the way in which speed is often tied up with money and access and critiques the easy assumption that slowness equals resistance (of the slow food movement he writes, "How bourgeois can you get? Who has the time and space to be slow by choice?" [23]). Rhythm is another category by which we might attend to time in relation to movement, and Cresswell points out the ways in which analysis of rhythm – and the identification of discordant or irregular rhythms – is being used as a surveillance tool sparked by fears of terrorism. The routes along which people and things travel also differ, and there are practices of channelling that attempt to control these routes, inevitably privileging some kinds of movement over others. Finally, Cresswell asks about the experience of travel ("how does it feel?" [25]) and the frictions that are applied to it ("when and how does it stop?" [26]). Again, the point is that these factors are uneven, and it is important not just to acknowledge this unevenness but also to attend to the specific factors that perpetuate it.

To consider mobility, of course, is always also to consider space, and the work of Doreen Massey has been significant in establishing space as itself a thing that moves. However, the ways in which we think about and write about space can serve to immobilize it. Massey warns of the dangers of a set of dominant ways of imagining space. She identifies three linked manoeuvres in such imagining: space as surface, in which "the trajectories of others can be immobilised while we proceed with our own"; space as timeline, in which some countries are perceived as somehow "behind" others; and space as separated from the "secure foundation" of local place (7–8). These imaginations, Massey suggests, function as "ways of taming the challenge that the inherent spatiality of the world presents" (7), and I am curious to pick this up in relation to contemporary voyage drama. To what extent, I wonder, do attempts to stage travel also work as attempts to fix and tame the otherwise overwhelming space of the world? It is for this reason that I have taken a quotation from Laura Levin's recent book *Performing Ground* as one of my epigraphs, above. Levin comments on a tendency for theatrical travelogues to reinforce, even while apparently undermining, an imagination of space as the

fixed background against which identity can emerge. She argues that, often, “an absolute model of space is inadvertently maintained through the narrative convention of travel as personal transformation” (176). Her book identifies a politically positive process of what she calls “performing ground” in a variety of art and performance works, where the self is shown to be enmeshed in the environment, the individual in the group, in a way that usefully undermines spatial absolutes and articulates “alternative forms of navigation” (177). Following Levin, this article asks which representational strategies are most problematic, and which hold most potential, in theatrical travel narratives. I propose that the approach to a politics of mobility that I have outlined in this section can help to unpick the possibilities and challenges of contemporary voyage drama. To begin to consider how this might work, I am going to take as an example one of the performances with which I opened this article: Complicite and Simon McBurney’s *The Encounter*.

Encountering the Amazon/Encountering McBurney

The Encounter is a theatrical traveller’s tale, staging a journey to a place that – even in today’s world of global mobilities – is still relatively inaccessible. It tells the true story of Loren McIntyre, a *National Geographic* photographer who, in 1969, led an expedition to a remote area in Brazil in search of the source of the Amazon. He got lost for weeks among the Mayoruna, an indigenous group, during which time he experienced what he believed to be a telepathic connection with the tribe’s headman, Barnacle. McIntyre told his story only in fragments: a couple of *National Geographic* articles focusing on the river itself; some photographs; but mostly only conversations with friends. The account was not published until twenty years later, in the form of a novel – *Amazon Beaming* – by the Romanian author Petru Popescu, who struck up a friendship with McIntyre on his own journey to the Amazon in the late 1980s. It was on Popescu’s novel that McBurney based his show, apparently having been so moved by his experience of reading the book in 1994 that he had spent twenty years wondering if, and how, he could find a way to stage it. In the process of creating the performance, McBurney too travelled to the Amazon, to meet descendants of the Mayoruna and to share with them the narrative approach he was developing for the show. So, we have three storytellers (with twenty years between each stage of the process), and also – importantly – three travellers. To return to some of the categories in Cresswell’s taxonomy, while a shared route was followed by these three men, it is clear that we could identify differences of motive and experience that impact upon the three narratives produced. But more significantly, the combined effect of their privi-

leged mobile status serves to diminish the audience's sense of the Mayoruna as themselves travellers. Towards the end of the performance, there is a sequence in which the tribespeople burn the huts of their village and walk through the forest for days until they reach another group with whom they can settle. But this sequence is represented not so much as a journey than in terms of escape, flight, drift and a "shuffling around" (*The Encounter* 57). In Kaplan's terms, the narrativization of their displacement is produced by others, not by them. We are told, through McIntyre, that the impetus has to do with time: the Mayoruna are "burning the past" in order to avoid being held "still in time," so that they can ultimately enact a return "to the beginning" (42–3). Understanding the tribe's travels in terms of time and life's rhythms is part of what seems to be the production's sincere attempt to engage with an unfamiliar sense of identity, but it also has the effect of playing down the spatial agency of Barnacle and his fellow travellers.

The "encounter" of the title represents, of course, McIntyre's encounter with the Amazonian landscape, with the Mayoruna and with Barnacle himself. It might also reference Popescu's chance encounter with McIntyre, which led to the wider dissemination of the story. Further, it seems clear in *Complicite's* production that we might understand the term as a fundamentally theatrical one, signalling the encounter between audience, performer and narrative within the space of the theatre. For the most striking aspect of this production – and the one that has preoccupied most reviewers – is its focus on sound trickery rather than visual effects. A binaural microphone head is placed centre stage and is used to capture McBurney's speech and sounds of movement alongside recordings played back on his mobile phone. This central microphone is supplemented by others at a desk stage right, including one that renders McBurney's voice in the lower tone that he uses when he is playing Loren McIntyre. Sounds created live in front of us are layered with pre-recorded rainforest noises and interviews with scientists and environmental activists. The distinction between live and recorded blurs: at times, live sounds are recorded on stage and then looped to create an audio backdrop; at others, a dialogue is staged between a recorded voice and McBurney's live presence; and on many occasions we are seduced into believing that we are listening to live sounds, only to have this belief undermined for theatrical impact. We, the spectators, access the resulting effect of 360 degree sound via headphones that we are instructed to put on during the opening speech and that are worn throughout the rest of the two-hour performance.

The Encounter both is and is not a solo travelogue in the style of the others that I have mentioned. This is not, on the face of it, McBurney's own story, and therefore the show does not have the autobiographical basis common to most travelogues: he is playing a character who travels, and performing a script adapted from somebody else's novel. However, the show layers the actor himself

(in both “exotic” and domestic settings) onto this narrative. In terms of the exotic, McBurney’s own journey to Brazil is foregrounded in the theatre programme, in the published script and in the series of post-show conversations accompanying the tour. The domestic setting is used to frame the performance: we hear the voice of McBurney’s young daughter in a sequence of conversations across the period of an evening at home as he works on the script and she cannot get to sleep.

These layers signal two features that we might extrapolate as typical of contemporary voyage drama. The first has to do with the role of the performer as filter or mediator between the material – the experience of travel – and the audience. In the case of *The Encounter*, the daughter’s interventions punctuate the event of the performance, prompting soundscapes that will transport us away from the domestic setting (“What animals are in the jungle? [...] What do they sound like?” [*The Encounter* 16]), commenting on the materiality of the show (“Dada, how long is this head going to be in our house?” [11]), reminding us of the real time in which we experience it (“How long has I been asleep?” / “Oh my sweetie, I don’t know, maybe half an hour or something” [49]), and establishing storytelling itself as a theme (“Will you tell me a story to help me sleep? [...] One from the book you’re reading” [62]). These sequences seem to be connected to the impulse that McBurney describes, in discussing the use of the binaural head, as a wish to expose the mechanisms of theatre: in a post-show discussion he notes that “I wanted people to be completely aware that they’re here, but at the same time have the experience of going somewhere else.” I would argue that it is the push and pull between the being here (in the theatre) and being transported (to somewhere beyond our usual routes) that creates a potential for critical space in what I am calling contemporary voyage drama, though it is clear that this potential is not always fully realised. I left *The Encounter* feeling excited about its display of theatrical technique but with a nagging sense that my interest in the story it told had declined just as McBurney’s seemed to increase. On reflection, I found that the potentially productive gaps between the travel story and the pragmatics of its representation were too often filled by the slickness of production. McBurney’s on-stage control over the technology seemed to suggest a control, too, over the complex spatiality invoked by the narrative; a *taming*, in Massey’s terms, that apparently engages with the unfamiliar but actually incorporates it within a set of well-rehearsed theatrical strategies.

I have suggested that one key feature of such travel narratives is the performer as mediator. The second feature that I want to point to here is connected to the first: it is the claim to authenticity. Even in the context of theatrical storytelling, there seems to be a requirement for the writer-performer actually to have done the travelling her/himself in order to convey this in the theatre. Travel is then explicitly added to the techniques of performance-making (though, as I indicate above

in my discussion of the travel underpinning theatre production and reception, it has always been an implicit part of how theatre is made), and it functions not only as a practical means of gathering material but also as a badge of integrity. One side effect of achieving such integrity, though, is paradoxically to reinforce the emphasis on the individual and on the journey as a rite of passage. The individual is certainly writ large in *The Encounter*. Though the stunning audio work can clearly only be achieved by an intense process of collaboration and by the presence in the theatre of sound designers working almost as performers, the performance reveals itself as a feat of McBurney's virtuosity. His position in relation to the narrative is registered as problematic by the artist and writer Rajni Shah. After watching the performance via livestream, Shah wrote on her blog that

I found that no matter how much the man in the show talked about a complex web of presence and authorship, he was writing the end to that story as his story, as the story of him standing on a stage and receiving critical acclaim. He was buying into the myth of authorship and authority and colonialism even as he claimed to disavow and disrupt it. He made that story end with him standing on a stage telling it. (*not knowing, listening, quietness*, n. pag.)

Despite the show's reflections on questions of consciousness and conflicting systems for understanding the self, the story that it tells – Loren McIntyre's story – is ultimately the age-old narcissistic travel narrative of one man temporarily escaping from his everyday life and in the process discovering something about himself. And the show's staging choices produce a doubling of this voyage of self-discovery in the central figure of McBurney.

There is an individualism, too, in the chosen address to the audience: *The Encounter*'s spectators are invited to experience the show as a much more intimate, almost one-to-one encounter than is usually the case in the theatre. In a 'making of' video on the production's website, McBurney clarifies that this was an explicit tactic: "when you put the headphones on, you get the feeling of being alone. McIntyre was [...] alone, so you have to reproduce the feeling of being alone [...] in an audience of several hundred people." He acknowledges that "it's a very odd thing, asking an audience to have an individual experience within a collective forum. But that is what happens." The result is striking. But what might be lost in this approach is a commitment to the theatre as a shared space in which to think through what it is to travel.

There are ways, I think, in which *The Encounter* attempts, in Levin's words, to undermine "spatial absolutes." A part of this is achieved through its audio trickery, which is used at times to disorientate the audience, to play with apparent certainties of spatial and temporal representation. In narrative terms, the performance takes seriously, following McIntyre, the possibility of learning

from the Mayoruna a less anthropocentric approach to our relationship with the natural world. And though its fascination with unfamiliar Mayoruna rhythms of movement feels somewhat romanticized, the show endeavours to reveal some of the mobility inequalities implicit in its story: applying the terms offered by Cresswell in his politics of mobility, we might take the performance as an invitation to contrast our own experiences of impetus for travel, rhythm, speed and friction with those represented here. There is a sense of *The Encounter* aiming in part to function as advocacy for a group of people who have not always benefited from global flows. The performance narrates the tribe's forced movement to escape those who seek to mine its landscape for resources to feed the world's fuel habit – “They will come. They will always come, looking for their oil, with planes and guns and alcohol” (52) – and McBurney drew on conversations with a campaigner for tribal peoples' rights, environmental activists, and tribe members in making the show. But all of this is secondary, occurring within a narrative frame that foregrounds an otherworldly and formative encounter between two men: McIntyre and Barnacle. (And when I use the term “foregrounds” here, I am reminded of Levin's work on ways of attending to the political potential of the background.) Entering into this encounter, another man – Simon McBurney – cannot be understood merely as the “actor” designated in the script; the narrative woven around McIntyre's figures this theatre project as a deeply felt personal quest, and one that is conveyed through McBurney's considerable performance skills.

All of which is to point to some of the challenges of representing travel in the theatre, and I want to suggest that these challenges are more political than they are technical. Or, more precisely, we need to recognise that each response to the underlying technical question of voyage drama – what techniques might be used to represent travel in the theatre? – will itself have political implications. The theatre continues to be a place to share stories of journeys, and it is connected in complex ways to other practices of journeying: those involved in journalism, tourism, science and migration, among others. To ask questions around how and why theatre travels – in its making processes, in generating its moments of reception, and in the journeys that it stages – is to consider how it operates within a wider context of mobility and, crucially, of the politics of that mobility. The pleasures of vicarious tourism – glimpses into an unknown world – seem to persist, at least to some extent, but I want also to hold on to the possibility that our travels in the theatre might be part of our creating a shared arena for making sense of the world and our role in it. We need to remain alert to the ways in which this *making sense* can so easily become a process of *taming*, in Massey's terms; to find spaces between the travel narrative and the mastery of performance in which to recognise our implication in the nature of the voyage dramas we share.

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Bionote

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